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1947: Russell Long showing the disc he found in his flower garden

Sommario

REDAZIONE

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This issue is much longer than usual due to the presence of two large articles about intriguing topics: the many "discs" found during the incredibly massive 1947 UFO wave (mainly practical jokes and advertisement stunts), and the appearance of extraterrestrials in the Spanish press in the 1940s and 1950s. Three shorter articles deal with obscure yet interesting episodes happened in Italy and in France between the 1920s and the 1950s.

As usual, abstracts in Italian and English are available at the last page of the issue.

1923: la “meteora nebulosa” di Udine

Una delle caratteristiche di parecchie fonti di nostro interesse che risalgono ai decenni precedenti la Seconda Guerra Mondiale è che coinvolgono persone capaci di lasciare una traccia biografica di rilievo. La cosa è spiegabile considerando il pubblico al quale buona parte dei periodici si rivolgeva: persone acculturate, classi borghesi, popolo inteso ad elevarsi socialmente. Nel complesso, solo una frazione della popolazione.
Questa struttura culturale è di gran vantaggio per lo storico dell’ufologia. Permette di fare ragionamenti sulle personalità incuriosite da “cose strane nel cielo”, di ipotizzare qualcosa sul coinvolgimento di istituzioni e gruppi, di pensare che i tentativi di recupero di fonti d’archivio possano rivelarsi profitttevoli.
Appartiene al gruppo appena delineato un episodio interessante verificatosi in Italia nel 1923.
Si tratta della descrizione di una “meteora” vista una sera di primavera avanzata a Udine, una città che da pochissimi anni era passata al Regno d’Italia grazie alla dissoluzione bellica dell’Impero Austro-Ungarico. Tutti i sette testimoni, di nazionalità italiana, erano stati in qualche misura coinvolti nelle vicende della guerra e ora si ritrovavano insieme a osservare il cielo fra persone colte, impegnate nelle vicende del loro tempo, talora benestanti e politicamente in vista.

Arturo Malignani (1865-1939) (da Wikipedia – pubblico dominio)

Fra tutti spicca l’autore della relazione che darà origine alla pubblicazione per la quale sappiamo che cosa accadde. Senza di lui è plausibile che quasi nessuno fra gli altri avrebbe pensato fosse opportuno render nota la vicenda.
Costui era Arturo Malignani (1865-1939) [1], un udinese che lavorerà moltissimo ad innovazioni nel campo dell’energia elettrica, diventerà industriale del cemento e dell’energia, sarà un grande fotografo ma che si appassionerà grandemente pure all’astronomia e alla meteorologia, coltivando in particolare quest’ultima.

[1] Su Arturo Malignani si vedano le pagine Internet: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arturo_Malignani e http://www.umfvg.org/drupal/node/113 (ultimo accesso per entrambe: 23 novembre 2017).

E' per questo che dal 1888 Malignani prese a fare misurazioni meteorologiche attendibili per la sua città e per l'intero Friuli, acquisendo rapidamente fama di ottimo osservatore e di registratore dello stato del tempo. I quaderni che teneva dovrebbero esser stati ben conservati dai suoi discendenti, anch'essi cultori di meteorologia. Potrebbe esserci qualcos'altro di interessante ai nostri scopi.

L'Osservatorio Malignani oggi (da: www.viaggioinfriulivenezíagiulia.it)

Fu per questa passione per l'atmosfera che Malignani acquisì fama imperitura innalzando, presso il castello di Udine, edificio simbolo della città, una costruzione nello stile neo-medievale che andava a inizio XX secolo.

Una torre d'osservazione sulla quale installare strumenti meteorologici in grado di accrescere la qualità del suo operato. La cosiddetta "torre Malignani" sorge ad ovest del castello dal 1908, in una zona verde presso la villa di famiglia brevemente abbandonata nel 1917 al momento della sconfitta italiana di Caporetto ma nella quale tutti erano ormai rientrati.

Camillo Malignani (1893-1960) (da: www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it)

Ma poi come testimoni c'erano ben altre sei persone indicate in calce alla relazione di Malignani. Il primo di essi era il figlio di Arturo, Camillo Malignani (1893-1960)[2], che a quel tempo aveva iniziato una brillante carriera di chimico industriale. Si appassionerà lui stesso di astronomia e meteorologia, proseguendo l'opera del padre all'osservatorio. Insieme ad Arturo e Camillo c'era la rispettiva moglie e madre, Maria Lupieri (?-1927).

Domenico Pecile (1852-1924) (da: Ferraris, Paola. "Domenico Pecile. Modernizzazione agricola…", Udine, La Nuova Base, 1996).

Il quarto era un agronomo e chimico udinese, Domenico Pecile (1852-1924)[3], che - a parte queste attività - era stato sindaco benemerito di Udine dal 1904 al 1920, fra l'altro riordinando le raccolte del museo civico lì ospitato. Insieme a lui la quinta della schiera, sua moglie Camilla. Chiudevano

[2] Su Camillo Malignani si veda la pagina: http://www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it/malignani-camillo/ (ultimo accesso: 23 novembre 2017).

[3] Su Domenico Pecile: http://sauvage27.blogspot.it/2011/01/domenico-pecile-1852-1924.html (ultimo accesso: 23 novembre 2017).

il gruppo altre due donne. La prima fu un'altra personalità notevole: Isabella Bigontina (Sperti da sposata, 1869-1969). Bigontina in anni recenti ha acquisito una certa notorietà fra gli storici delle donne a causa della pubblicazione del suo diario[4] che - ora conservato presso l'Archivio diaristico di Pieve Santo Stefano - dopo la fine della Prima Guerra Mondiale usò per difendersi dalle accuse di aver avuto sentimenti filo-austriaci, visto che mentre il marito fuggiva in Italia lei rimaneva a Belluno, dove abitavano.

Isabella Bigontina Sperti (1869-1969)

L'altra donna era una certa Virginia Sperti, che plausibilmente era una parente della Bigontina.
Ignoro in che modo queste ultime due donne fossero in rapporto con Malignani e perché si trovassero presso il suo osservatorio.

* * *

L'articolo che ci interessa uscì alle pp. 80-82 del numero del maggio-giugno 1925, anno XIV della rivista torinese "Urania" che, nata nel 1911 con intento precipuo di divulgare l'astronomia (agli inizi s'intitolava un po' faticosamente "Saggi di astronomia popolare"), dal 1920 - assuntane la guida il geologo cuneese Federico Sacco (1864-1948) - allargò i suoi campi d'interesse in specie alle scienze della terra e acquisì una certa diffusione.
La relazione pubblicata era indirizzata "a V. S. Ill.ma", quindi è da pensare che Malignani l'avesse inviata allo stesso direttore di "Urania", cioè a Sacco, che la pubblicò senza nulla aggiungere. Vi antepose solo due righe di presentazione: il fenomeno descritto da Malignani, che era socio della "Urania", per lui era "assai raro e strano". Il geologo commentava in breve che "qualcosa d'analogo" era presente alla p. 247 e seguenti di uno dei libri dell'astronomo tedesco Max Wilhelm Meyer,"L'universo stellato", titolo con il quale era uscito in Italia nell'anno 1900 per la UTET di Torino. Il rinvio fatto da Sacco a un'altra notizia presente nello stesso numero si riferiva all'incredibile spettacolo della cosiddetta "Grande processione meteorica" del 9 febbraio 1913, quella vista su parte considerevole del continente americano e la cui natura aveva dato origine a una controversia scientifica notevole in specie fra i geologi. Non ho consultato il libro di Meyer, ma da queste righe la perplessità di Sacco per la relazione di Malignani mi pare traspaia.

[4] (a cura di Adriana Lotto). "Una donna in Guerra: diario di Isabella Bigontina Sperti 1917-1918", Verona, Cierre Edizioni, 1996. Su Bigontina: Belzer, Allison Scardino. "Women and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy", New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 158-9.

Non è chiaro se sia stata la direzione della rivista ad assegnare il titolo alla relazione del friulano, ma egli al termine farà ampio riferimento all'espressione lì utilizzata nell'ultima parte dello scritto.

Il rapporto fu infatti attribuito a *Una meteora nebulosa nel cielo di Udine*, cioè alla stessa categoria di fenomeni meteorici dai presunti caratteri insoliti segnalati in quegli anni su diverse riviste astronomiche e definite appunto *météores nebuleux* in ambito francofono.

L'osservazione iniziò verso le 22.30 di giovedì 10 maggio 1923 (era un giorno di festa, ricorrendo l'Ascensione).

Non è del tutto chiaro in quale punto di Udine si trovassero, ma dai particolari penso che Malignani e gli altri fossero proprio sull'osservatorio, ossia sulla torre che si trova a ovest del castello di Udine: è comunque certo che da qualche punto vicino al castello stavano osservando il cielo con un grande binocolo quando il fenomeno ne attirò l'attenzione.

…con cielo interamente sereno ed atmosfera calmissima di regime anticiclonico e l'occhio da oltre un'ora abituato all'oscurità[5]*, fu visto da me e da altre sei persone qui sottoscritte apparire in direzione sud-ovest una massa nebulosa che avanzava rapidamente e si spostava verso nord-est.*

La velocità di avanzamento era simile a quella delle nebbie basse spinte dal vento durante i temporali; il movimento era però matematicamente regolare.

L'apparizione nebulosa nel mentre si avvicinava allo zenit lasciava però chiaramente e indubbiamente vedere che essa, anziché nebulosa, era bensì costituita da numerosissime stelle delle quali alcune dello splendore delle stelle di quarta grandezza. Tra le caratteristiche della osservazione notammo le seguenti:

1) il fascio stellare che poteva avere una ampiezza approssimativa di tre o quattro diametri lunari mutò di poco (appena il doppio) la sua ampiezza con l'avvicinarsi allo zenit. L'impressione nostra è che il fascio in parola non passasse molto lontano dalla Terra, ma non abbiamo elementi per poter precisare la distanza. Il fascio non lasciò dietro di se alcuna scia perciò riteniamo che passasse molto fuori dalla nostra atmosfera.

2)la colorazione delle singole stelle era giallo-rossastro. Se si ammette che emanassero luce propria in tal caso la loro temperatura non doveva superare i 1400-1500 gradi. E' possibile però che l'apparizione non abbia attraversato il cono d'ombra pel nostro pianeta, ed in tal caso avrebbero potuto essere corpi celesti illuminati dal Sole.

[5] Nel 1923 non ebbe vigenza l'ora legale.

3) dal primo momento in cui l'apparizione fu scorta a circa 15/16 gradi sull'orizzonte S.W. fino al momento in cui il castello di Udine ce ne impedì la visione non passarono meno di 15 minuti secondi, e non più di 30.

4) la direzione percorsa con moto regolarissimo fu esattamente sud-ovest nord-est.

L'altitudine raggiunta allo zenit circa 60/70 gradi sull'orizzonte sud.

Malignani si riteneva fortunato di aver visto il fenomeno, sia per la breve durata, sia perché proprio allora lui e gli altri in quel momento si stavano dedicando all'osservazione di Giove e Saturno con un grande binocolo Zeiss da 130 mm. Nella relazione, comunque, non ci sono appigli per pensare che i testimoni abbiano inquadrato il corpo con lo strumento ottico.

* * *

Dopo l'esperienza Malignani si premurò di chiedere a più fonti un parere su quanto il gruppo aveva visto. Per questo, scrisse dapprima "ad uno dei principali osservatori italiani" (non ricevendo risposta) e al collaboratore per la rubrica astronomica (una colonna giornalistica allora diffusa) di un quotidiano importante, che avrebbe replicato parlando di "allucinazione". Su "Urania" Malignani rispose all'idea dell'allucinazione spiegando che il fatto era stato del tutto evidente per tutti e sette e che si era trattato "di uno dei fenomeni più interessanti e più rari che il cielo ci abbia offerto alla visione ad occhio nudo, tanto che ne rimanemmo emozionati".
Però, a Malignani dall'estero erano giunte, dopo le sue richieste, altre due missive che per lui contenevano "le due ipotesi più serie ed attendibili".
La prima arrivava dal prof. Alfred Wolf (cognome storpiato nel testo in "Wolfer"), dello "Eidgenössische Sternwarte" (Osservatorio federale) di Zurigo.
Wolf scartava l'ipotesi allucinatoria, riteneva difficile discriminare tra "fenomeno terrestre o cosmico" ma in sostanza propendeva per un bolide esploso non distante dall'orizzonte locale e i cui frammenti avrebbero proseguito la loro corsa.
Tuttavia, Malignani era assai più soddisfatto per la seconda lettera, quella pervenutagli da Emile Touchet, vice-segretario della "Société Astronomique de France".
La missiva di Touchet ebbe un ruolo decisivo nel ridefinire l'esperienza di Malignani. Identificava il corpo con una delle misteriose *meteore nebulose* e rimandava agli articoli al riguardo usciti nel corso degli anni su "L'Astronomie", la rivista della Société.
Touchet era molto amico di Fernand Baldet (1885-1964), astronomo che quasi di certo coniò l'espressione "meteore nebulose" e popolarizzò le osservazioni di meteore "anomale", al punto che lo stesso Malignani in chiusura della sua relazione non fece altro che riprendere uno degli scritti più celebri di Baldet sulla questione, quello uscito alle pp. 451-456 del vol. 23 del 1909 della rivista della Société. Anzi, una delle osservazioni di Baldet, quella del 1° agosto 1908, a Malignani ricordava la sua per la forma ad arco

del fenomeno. Anche i disegni fatti da Baldet (il corpo del 1908 avrebbe sotteso undici gradi!) erano utili per "farsi una esatta idea della parentela fra il fenomeno da noi osservato e la descrizione del Baldet".
Ma del francese Malignani si riteneva più fortunato: "per la sua vicinanza alla Terra", da lui ritenuta certa, era stato possibile "distinguere ad occhio nudo nel modo più nitido e sicuro le principali stelluzze costituenti il fascio".
In conclusione: questo "fascio" formato da una gran quantità di "stelluzze" giallo-rosse, privo di scia, era stato osservato per una ventina di secondi mentre si spostava con moto del tutto regolare da un'altezza sull'orizzonte di 15 gradi circa sino a una di circa 55 (sto approssimando i valori forniti da Malignani), mentre s'ingrandiva da una dimensione angolare iniziale di 1,5-2 gradi sino a una di 3-4 gradi, dunque traslando nella volta celeste a una velocità di circa 2,5 gradi/secondo.
E' plausibile che la durata complessiva della manifestazione sia stata maggiore, visto che la possibilità di seguirla cessò a causa del frapporsi del castello fra essa e gli osservatori.

(*g. s.*)

Here they are! Early crashes of flying saucers: a short visual history

Just after Independence Day of 1947 flying saucers became the top favorite argument of most people in the US, and the newspapers (and the radio as well) kept offering an outstanding wealth of information for about one week. Although most people claimed to be skeptical about those gadgets reported in the American skies, a vast majority of them was curious at least and eager to see one of them.

More, the common idea was that whether those contraptions really flew in large numbers all over the States, they had to crash sooner or later. People were waiting for that, the ultimate chance to see a flying saucer and finally understand what it was. Some journalists hoped the same in their comment columns. In a few very rare cases this seemed to happen. For example, an Associated Press dispatch quoted by few newspapers[6] reported that three hunters claimed to have seen scores of shining objects whirling over Wild Horse Park, a remote area in Colorado. Reaching the spot where the objects appeared to have plunged to the ground, they found flat plates of burned out matter, ranging in size from a saucer to a soup plate and golden brown in color. They said they were on an extended hunting expedition and unaware of the excitement stirred up by the reports of flying discs and did not return with any of their finds.

At the end of the very first week of the saucer era, a "shining disc" was found on the ground. A one Troy Pendergrass said he chased a flying disc on June 29 in Ash Canyon, New Mexico: "it looked bright as a mirror" and then, with some friends, he found it on the ground. It was just a five by an eight-inch piece of tinfoil, slightly heavier than that used for gum wrappers, and was very crinkled. It looked as if it had been wrapped around a circular object, partially burned and melted[7]. Another funny contraption was found by two too enthusiast guys in Portland in early July. Everything was good for a "disc": it was just a 3x2 foot piece of white paper, of cheap quality, slightly yellowed around the edges. It fluttered down from an estimated altitude of 4,000 feet to land on

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[6] Walla Walla Union Bulletin, The Tipton Daily Tribune, The McKinney Daily Courier-Gazette July 9, 1947

[7] The Gallup Independent, Abilene Reporter News, The Oregon Statesman, Dallas Morning News, The Paris News July 1, 1947

a golf course. Then it was turned over to *The Oregonian* newspaper for "scientific examination."[8]

For some of them finding anything a bit stranger than usual was enough to fulfill their curiosity. Weather balloons or parts of them began to be reported in the press since July 5[9]. The husband of Mrs. Sherman Campbell from Circleville, Ohio, found a six-pointed, tinfoil-covered star-like object on their farm, about 50 inches high and 48 inches large. A balloon was attached to the star. Several newspapers published a couple of different photos of Mrs. Sherman holding the "flying disc" until July 9[10], peaking on July 7. Several other cases of grounded balloons (or parts of them) followed in the next days and weeks, but they were local episodes that usually never left the pages of local newspapers.

The Des Moines Regitser July 6, 1947

Other people exploited the saucer craze to making fun of some specific persons or the neighbors as a whole. Saucers were a strong, fresh topic and everybody was ready to consider it and give it a large coverage. Something similar had already happened in other situations in the past, including the relevant airship wave happened in the US between November 1896 and April 1897 (the 1947 newspapers sometimes quoted it, reporting the memories of a few old persons who recalled those events). In that 50-year-old wave, the "yellow journalism" of the time contributed with several hoaxes.

The Daily Reporter July 7, 1947

Just after the publication of news about rewards promised by industrialists, associations and department stores for a "real" flying saucer, several crashed discs began to appear in the courtyards or gardens all around the United States. There were several tens of episodes of such a kind[11]. Some of them gained nationwide notoriety, and a few even triggered an investigation by the FBI or the Army. After over 70 years it is very hard to understand how it was even possible to consider those silly contraptions as something

8 The Oregonian July 5, 1947

9 The Circleville Herald July 5, 1947; Columbus Daily Dispacth, The Des Moines Register July 6, 1947

10 Richmond Palladium, The Bismarck Tribune, Casper Star Tribune July 9, 1947

11 American UFO student Kenny Young published online a "Chronological database of 1947 flying saucer crashes" at http://kenny.anomalyresponse.org/47index.html The list is a good reference work but still to be completed with other several entries.

"strange." They were crude or extremely crude homemade gadgets which even the most naive guy could not consider seriously today. But in 1947, although usually considered laughable, they were "accepted" and often introduced by the newspapers as a funny solution for those flying things reported in the sky. Nobody knew what the saucers were, so everything was possible, and they were a good chance to talk about them with something at hand.

Spokane Daily Chronicle July 14, 1947

As told before, those crashed saucers were also thought as a way to naively solve the mystery and cash in the high rewards promised all around the country (from $1,000 to $8,000, which means something about between $11,500 and $92,000 at today's values). One reward seems to have been paid in one case at least. On July 13 the Spokane Athletic Round Table would have paid a $ 1,.000 for a "reasonable facsimile"[12] of a disc. Four boys at the Washington state children's home heard an explosion and rushed out to find a highly burnished disk lying in scorched grass, or in the trees near the home, according to a local newspaper publishing a photograph on its front page[13]. Likely it was just a funny way to exploit the news of the day to introduce a previously scheduled donation. The Round Table frequently made gifts to small schools and orphanages for sports programs, and the club's members seemed to know just where to go to examine the disk. Later they announced that the money had to go toward construction of a new gymnasium for the orphan children.

The desire to get the own name on the local newspaper and have a "real saucer" to show proudly to the friends were equally strong motivations to spend time in creating a gadget. It seems that people were making fun of finding and discussing those "crashed saucers." Generally speaking, it was a sort of popular attraction, a cheap amusement not necessarily related to the idea of a secret weapon or another exotic source, although the technology was the driving concept of the crude models prepared by the pranksters.

This article puts together a short visual history of some of those little flying saucers that amused many American readers during the summer of 1947, making extensive use of rare photographs usually published by obscure local American newspapers. I will deal

12 Walla Walla Union Bulletin July 15, 1947
13 Spokane Daily Chronicle July 14, 1947

with the events reported with some photographic evidence only, namely a minority of all the retrieval cases published by the press during the summer of that year.

CRASH-LANDED SAUCERS

Life July 21, 1947

One of the earliest findings of crashed discs got a huge press coverage all over the United States, even with pictures on the front pages, and it was reported by some foreign papers too. It was that funny and improbable to be likely used as a prototype for the nonsense of all the saucer stories that were becoming overwhelming in those days. Press and radio used it for ironic comments and gags (for example using joking titles like “He saw a saw”), sometimes delivering conflicting news. A Catholic priest, Joseph Brasky of St. Joseph Church at Grafton, Wisconsin, said he heard a whizzing noise the morning of July 6. A second later he heard a “bang!” like a firecracker. Brasky stepped outside and found a sheet metal disc on the church lawn. It was about 18 (or 15) inches in diameter, resembling a circular saw blade: it had a jagged edge with saw teeth. Although the grass was still wet from the night rain, the object was still warm (as reported by a United Press dispatch, but according to other reports “it was too hot to handle”[14]), weighed about four or five pounds and was about one eight of an inch thick. It looked greasy and somewhat dirty. In the middle of the disc, there was a one and three-eighths inch hole, and in the opening were “gadgets and some wires,” while other sources refer to a peculiar wiring arrangement from the middle to the outside edge. To each end of the cluster of wires was attached what looked like a small condenser about three inches long and wrapped in still sticky black tape. Father Brasky said he had notified the FBI of his find[15]: supposedly the object struck one of the church lighting rods, because a glass ball had been knocked off it. Friends of the priest knew he was the well-known author of the “Fish Tales” book: one of them, Father Charlie, was quite sure that the disc was taken off Brasky’s own buzz-saw[16]. The FBI identified the disk as a circular saw, bearing

The Philadelphia Enquirer July 8, 1947

14 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel July 7, 1947

15 Rocky Mountains News, Dayton Journal July 7, 1947

16 The McHenry Plaindealer July 10, 1947

the label of a mail order house[17] and a marking reading "… Steel, high carbon100 percent steel" ("Approved, Dunlap," according to another source), noticed the first time by Father Brasky when he examined the object closely.

A "saucer" was found on the late afternoon of July 7 in Shreveport, Louisiana. The front page of a local newspaper[18] reported the episode, but it found space on many papers all over the States. Unlike other cases, a man claimed to have heard and seen the disc whirling through the air, and then he retrieved it from the middle of the street. This F.G. "Happy" Harston said it "came over a signboard adjacent to the lot" from a northerly direction. It was flaming as it spun, but when he picked it up, it was cold. The object was a 16-inch aluminum disc, on which had been mounted two tubular radio condensers, a fluorescent light "starter" and some copper wire. Probably someone hurled the disc, after coating it with some inflammable substance and igniting it before launching. It was examined by an FBI agent, and the local police then turned over to a military base. An airplane wing tip was found on July 7 and immediately called a "flying saucer." Some employees of the night shift of the Southern's Railroad Ludlow coach yard, Kentucky, picked up a piece of metal wing from a dismantled plane, which had fallen from a carload of scrap. On the wing tip they chalked "Half a flying saucer." The local police chief and newspapermen quickly exposed the practical joke[19].

The Shreveport Times July 8, 1947

Life July 21, 1947

Pictures in the FBI report dated July 23, 1947

The Cincinnati Times-Star July 8, 1947

17 Chicago Tribune July 7, 1947
18 The Shreveport Times July 8, 1947
19 The Cincinnati Post, The Cincinnati Times-Star, The Kentucky Post July 8, 1947

Tucson Daily Citizen July 8, 1947

On July 8, the same day when the Roswell story emerged on the American newspapers, an Arizona paper[20] published a photograph depicting two reporters examining the remnants of a "flying saucer" found at a ranch 12 miles south near the Nogales highway. It was just a "radiosonde modulator" sent aloft by weather balloons. The day after in Amarillo, Texas, a young electrical contractor named W.J. Wisdom was riding along a highway with his wife. They saw a reflected flash of light from something near the highway and close to a radio tower. The man picked up the shiny object: it was an aluminum disc with three holes. A reporter and a photographer of the local newspaper, later publishing the story on its front page, went to the local KGNC radio station and got the confirmation that the object was just a radio recording disc. The newspaper[21] joked about it, closing the article with "… and that made electrical man Wisdom the first man in the nation to confirm his "disc" really was a disc."

Amarillo Daily News July 9, 1947

Enticed by the $ 3,000 reward reported by many newspapers, some boys in Rochester, New York, brought discs to the police for investigations. They were immediately considered as crude boy pranks. A 14-inch cardboard disc was found and photographed on a treetop: it looked like a part of a hat box or some similar container. A 15-year old girl found it, claiming to have heard it whizzing through the sky before landing[22].

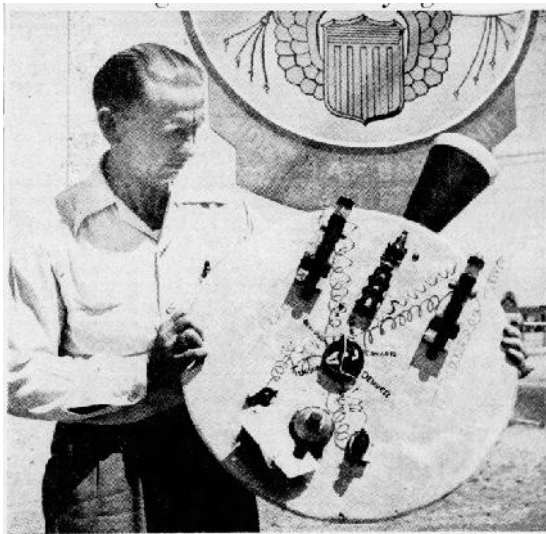
Beaver Valley Times July 9, 1947

A jokester attached two small balloons to an ordinary coffee cup, and let it fly. It was then found in a gutter near Greentown, Ohio, where it crashed because one of the balloons broke[23]. A much more complex gadget was put together by the employees of an Arizona company using

20 Tucson Daily Citizen July 8, 1947
21 Amarillo Daily News July 9, 1947
22 Beaver Valley Times July 9, 1947
23 The Akron Beacon Journal July 9, 1947

Beaver Valley Times July 9, 1947

the descriptions provided by the people claiming to have seen the mysterious flying discs[24]. It was carried down a street in the afternoon of July 9 without arousing a single comment from pedestrians. The gadget was 24 inches in diameter and made from shiny aluminum, loaded with a burned-out radar tube, coils, and other business-like parts.

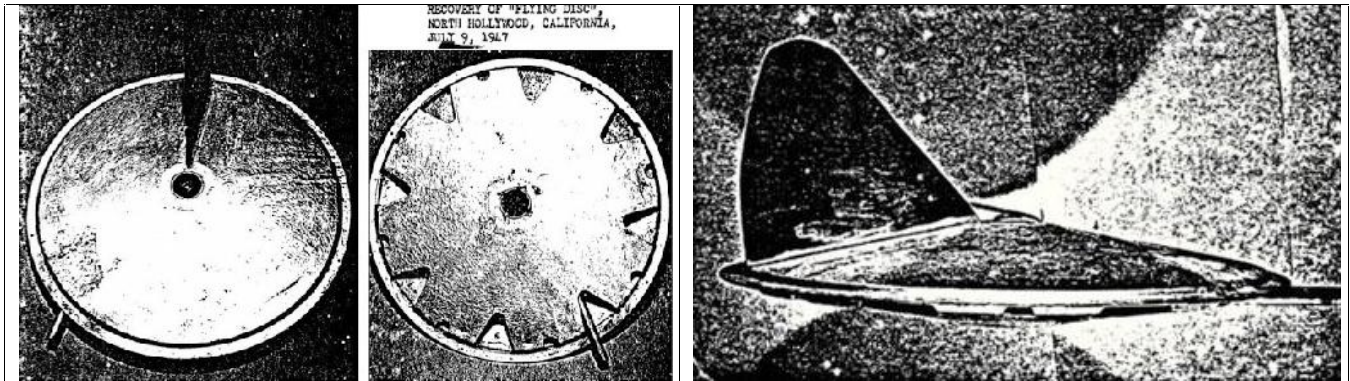
The Akron Beacon Journal July 9, 1947

Arizona Daily Star July 10, 1947

That same July 9 another "retrieval" took place in North Hollywood, California, immediately becoming one of the most popular episodes of the 1947 wave, covered by hundreds of newspapers, often on the front page. Many of them published pictures of the "disc," especially one depicting it on the desk of Fire Chief Wallace Newcomb, later used by magazines, including a popular weekly in 1949[25]. Some firemen recovered a metal 30-inch disc-shaped object in a garden. According to an FBI report dated July 17, an unknown woman had called the local fire department reporting that a disc had dropped in her garden, where it began to flame. A truck was sent there and put out the flaming object with the fire hose; then it was taken to the fire station. Most newspapers reported Russell Long, a construction engineer, as the man who called the fire department to claim that a flashing and smoking disc had landed in his flower garden. The contraption was made of

Saturday Evening Post May 7, 1949

Binghamton Press July 10, 1947

24 Arizona Daily Star July 10, 1947
25 Saturday Evening Post May 7, 1949

two convex steel discs fused together at the outer edge and fastened together in the center by a hollow cylindrical connection. A vertical galvanized iron fin was screwed to the top of the disc, and a short length of pipe closed at one end ran from the outer circumference into the interior of the object. A radio tube was mounted in the center of the top side. It was a hoax[26], and many papers highlighted the fact that it had happened just in Hollywood[27].

FBI pictures of the North Hollywood disc

July 9 was the favorite day for pranksters, just following the top coverage of saucer news in the American press, fuelled by the announcements of generous rewards for those bringing a genuine flying disc. A Ralph S. Waterbury found a circular object in his yard at Arlington Heights, Illinois[28]. It was about 17 inches in diameter and had two insulators, two ceramic condensers, and a radio frequency choke affixed to it. The disk was just an old broadcast transcription record. A picture depicting Mrs. Ruth Waterbury (possibly the man's wife) showing the disc, next to her dog, was published by some newspapers across the States, sometimes on the front page[29].

The Chicago Tribune July 10, 1947

Wilmington Daily Press July 18, 1947

Other pranksters left a metallic disc in the hedge of the front yard of Mr. William Kindl, in Iowa City,

26 The same FBI document dated July 17 quoted someone (name blackened) reporting about a group of young high school students he met in a North Hollywood service station, where there was a considerable talk about the disc found in the vicinity. He got a definite impression they either had themselves or knew of someone who had been working for the "past two weeks" making the disc.

27 Binghamton Press July 10, 1947

28 The Chicago Tribune July 10, 1947

29 The Courier Gazette, The Daily Reporter July 15, 1947; The Kane Republican July 16, 1947

Iowa City Press Citizen July 10, 1947

Iowa. It was composed of two aluminum cake pans sealed together at the rims with a type of gold solder. Inside there was an array of electrical apparatus, including a gold-painted radio tube, a large cork, wires and miscellaneous other gadgets. The caption introducing the photo[30] of the man with the disc commented ironically about the "possible" Martian origin of the contraption: "If men from Mars flew to earth in the 'flying disc' above, they must have been pretty small, or possibly they were gremlins."

The Waterloo Courier July 10, 1947

It seems that some people were ready to sell anything for a flying saucer or its remnants. Although the significant amount of money of the rewards promised during the peak days of the wave was a distant mirage, they could get the personal gratification of having their names published on the local newspaper, or even beyond. Again on July 9 in Iowa, a certain Carl Larsen found a sort of burned fabric and what looked like carbon ash in a cornfield[31]. For some unknown reason, such a substance was related to a flying disk.

The Bismarck Tribune July 12, 1947

A few pranksters wanted "to see what would happen" and test the gullibility of the people in their community. An episode on July 11 in North Dakota was paradigmatic. Five men built a saucer during the night and placed it on the lawn of the Miller family in Woodworth, where it was found in the early morning. Hundreds of visitors flocked to the place on foot, by car and in planes[32]. The men admitted the hoax, claiming they built the saucer from the bottom of a wash tub, a lampshade, some tubes and wiring from weather observing equipment, some strands of human hair and miscellaneous electrical equipment. The object had been painted with a thick cover of silver paint and had a propeller

The Bismarck Tribune July 12, 1947

30 Iowa City Press Citizen July 10, 1947
31 The Waterloo Courier July 10, 1947
32 The Bismarck Tribune July 12, 1947

that turned out to be the fan blades of an automobile heater. With the letters "X441" and "Delco Appliance Corporation" on its side[33]. As in other cases of "crashed saucers," the military (and the FBI) was involved in understanding what was happening. It is likely they were overwhelmed by the gigantic deal of information reported by the press (and to a lesser, yet important, extent by the radio) that was influencing people and the popular thinking in those weeks. They were worried by this and the possibility that foreign aircrafts could be actually behind the sightings, but all that mess made them pretty confused, and prone to investigate even blatant hoaxes such as the unlikely discs found in yards and gardens. The fact that the military or the FBI used their time to follow (and later report) those and other ridiculous episodes was later exploited by diehard UFO believers to show that something should exist for real. Hearing of the Woodworth "saucer" Capt. G.W. McCoy, army air forces liaison officer of the North Dakota wing of the civil air patrol, called army intelligence headquarters in Washington for instructions. McCoy was given orders to see that the object was "watched and closely guarded" and to have it brought to CAP headquarters in Fargo. He was also told to see that "as little publicity as possible" be given the object[34]. It seems that the five men confessed their hoax just after the involvement of McCoy[35].

La Crosse Tribune July 11, 1947

On July 10 another find took place in Black River Falls, Wisconsin[36] and was reported by several newspapers across the United States. Sigurd Hanson, a city electrician, came across a saucer-shaped object in a field of the local fairgrounds. At that spot, a mark of about five to six feet(1.5 – 1.8 meters) was visible in the grass where the object skidded[37]. It was like two medium-sized soup bowls placed together, silver in color and reflecting light. It had a sort of motor, the size of a man's fist, placed in the center, as well as a two-inch propeller with two metal blades. The gadget also had a radio tube (actually a photo-electric cell with the letters "R.C.A." on it) and a four-inch vertical fin. Next to the latter, there was a scorched section: the caption of a

La Crosse Tribune July 12, 1947

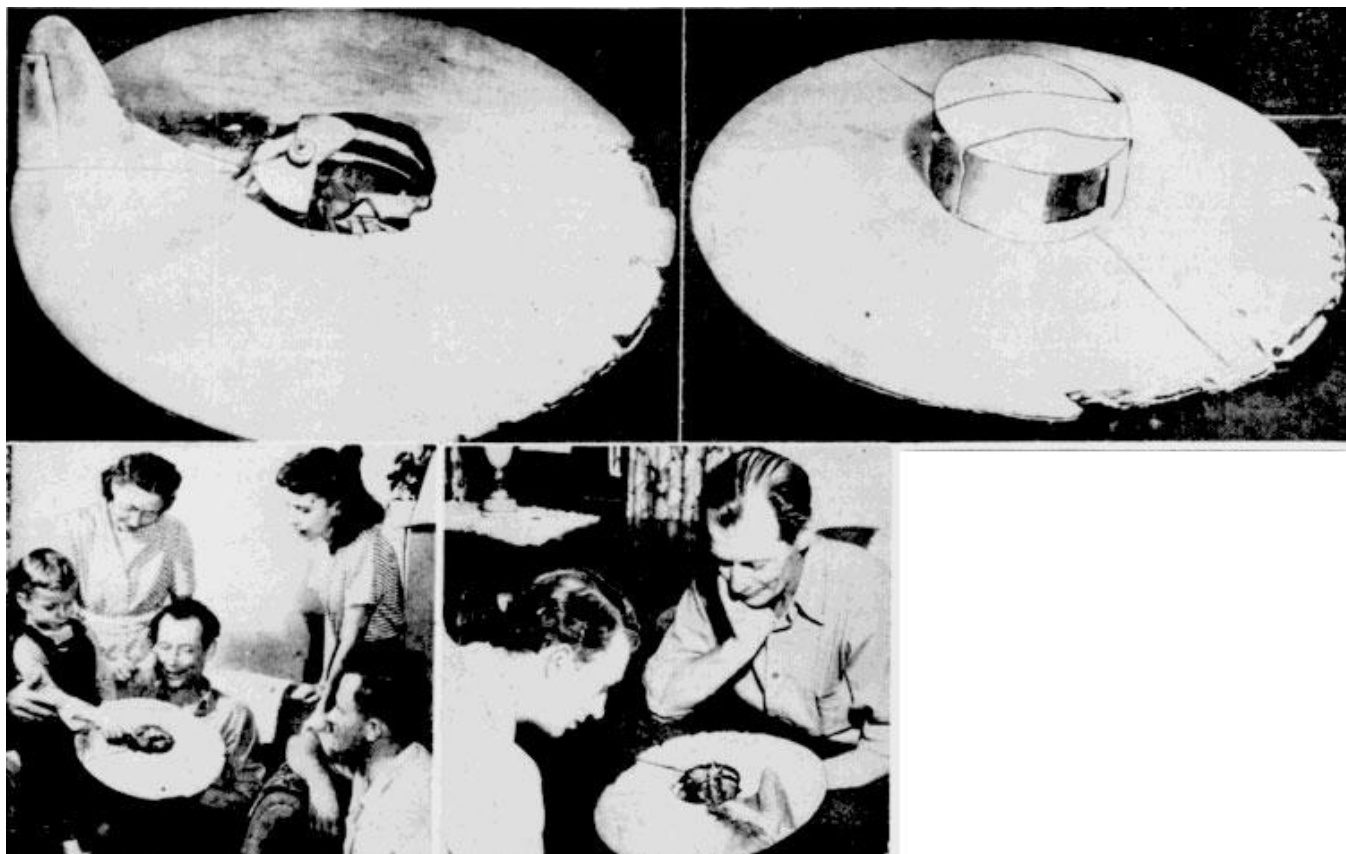
33 St. Cloud Times, Rapid City Journal July 11, 1947
34 The Argus Leader, Daily Illini July 12, 1947
35 Palladium Item July 12, 1947
36 Green Bay Press Gazette, Marshfield News Herald, Monroe Evening Times, Racine Journal Times, Milwaukee State Journal July 11, 1947; Eau Claire Leader, The Daily Tribune July 12, 1947
37 La Crosse Tribune July 11, 1947

La Crosse Tribune July 11, 1947

photo depicting it suggested that "jet propulsion may have been used to launch the unusually constructed object." It was about 15.5 inches in diameter and weighed about 1.5 pounds. Lt. Frederick Frederickson, CAP squadron commander at Black River Falls, asked CAP authorities to inspect the mysterious disc. Then Col. Harry W. Schaefer, commanding officer of the Wisconsin Civil Air patrol[38], went to Black River Falls to examine the object and later reported his findings to the army officials. He thought it was a hoax, but he wasn't sure. The local Chamber of Commerce locked the disk in a bank vault and refused to give it to Schaefer to bring to Milwaukee[39]. The Chamber of Commerce did much more. It put the disc on display, at 20 cents (plus tax) per look, expecting "a thousand" persons on Sunday July 13. Mr Hanson turned the disc over to the Chamber: it was placed in a glass case in the armory of their building, and two men were to guard it while on exhibit. The proceeds were to go to Hanson, who also expected "to collect the reward money offered for an explanation of the flying saucer mystery"[40], namely the $ 1,000 reward offered by the World Inventor Congress in session those days at Hollywood, California. Hanson was already thinking to use that money to build a garage and porch at his house[41].

38 A few days before Schaefer had been quoted by many American newspapers about the planned patrolling of the skies in search for the flying discs.

39 Milwaukee State Journal July 12, 1947

40 Eau Claire Leader, La Crosse Tribune July 13, 1947

41 La Crosse Tribune July 11, 1947

La Patrie July 11, 1947

The discs were found in Canada too. A one Mrs. F. Brown from Toronto showed a round object (curiously having a sort of aperture in the rear, similar to later saucer imagery) with a copper tube on a side and a cardboard roller above[42]. The day after another episode was reported from London, Ontario. A cylinder of the same size of a regular stovepipe was found, on the evening of July 11, on the grass of the summer house of Mrs. Alton Upthegrove. According to a Canadian newspaper[43], nobody knew where the object came from, but it would have been seen "land in a trail of light."

La Patrie July 12, 1947

Two more findings came from Minneapolis[44], back in the USA. Mr. Eugene Peterson was working in his garden when an object came hurtling over a nearby fence. After inspection, it resulted made of two tin plates, to one of which was attached a shaky propeller. Inside it, there were a Roman candle, a gasoline-soaked rag and the top of a pepper can. Mr. E.H. Moehlenbrock, who operated a tree and plant nursery, found the remains of a disk in his tomato plants. It had no means of propulsion and was made from two sheet metal cones joined together. It was empty and had three 18-inch "legs" (a sort of landing gear) on one side. The man thought it might have been a smokestack ventilator.

The Minneapolis Star July 11, 1947

The Minneapolis Star July 11, 1947

A certain Joseph Kemper found a large disc in a cornfield north of the town of York, Pennsylvania, and brought it to the local police headquarters. It was made from aluminum, with the size of a large radio record. It had several tubes,

42 La Patrie July 11, 1947
43 La Patrie July 12, 1947
44 The Minneapolis Star July 11, 1947

condensers, resistors and other paraphernalia soldered on and some rubber tubing attached. The object had some alleged Oriental characters painted over it in red[45]. The abundance of technological add-ons, in this and other episodes alike, was likely a naive attempt of the pranksters to give a sort of high-tech look to what was believed a sort of Buck Rogers stuff.

The Gazette and Daily July 12, 1947

On July 11 another finding of a "flying disc" got large national notoriety, being published by hundreds of newspapers (also abroad), often on the front page[46]. A 30.5-inch object with a hard metal dome on one side and a frosted plexiglass dome about 14 inches high[47] on the opposite side was found anchored in place by what appeared to be stove bolts, at Twin Falls, Idaho. It was gold painted on one side and silver on the other, and it appeared to have been turned out by machine. Stamped into the metal near the outer edge of the disc were the words "Inspected by TM." It was found by Mrs. Fred Easterbrook after she "heard a crash" in a yard near her home around 2:30 (but the saucer had already been left there a few hours before ...). An FBI agent inspected the gadget and described it as similar to the "cymbals used by a drummer in a band, placed face to face," adding that he could see three radio tubes inside the plastic dome. The case was reported to the FBI office in Butte, Montana and military intelligence at Ft. Douglas, Utah: army officers from the fort went to Twin Falls by plane and took the object to their base. They also confiscated all the pictures taken of the object: only pictures were those taken by local police[48].

LATE BULLETIN

Times News

MAGIC VALLEY EDITION

Rift With Red Bloc Widening

Shades of Buck Rogers! This Is What Landed in Twin Falls

Attention Focuses On City as 'Disc' Is Found in Yard

11,000 Acres Burned In Fire at Minidoka

Ten Per Cent Drop in Meat Supplies Seen

Special Report Set On 'State-of-Nation'

Egypt Appeals For Ouster of Briton Troops

Two Hurt in Plane Crash Near Heglar

'Cag' Reports Army of Disc In California

FLASHES of LIFE

Senate Boost In Funds for Land Agreed

Rails Plead for Higher Mail Pay

Elko Grass Fire Is Under Control

Water Pressure Improvement at Burley Planned

Unveiled Yesterdays Windows Draw Throngs of Spectators

No Trace in Film Taken by Boisean

Wanted: An Old Stagecoach for Yesterdays Fete

Spud Gags Hit as 2 Governors Meet

Flight Promised At Legion Meet

Slavs Aver U. S. Army Unit Spied

Truck Sets Range Fire at King Hill

Wet, Hot

Twin Falls Times News July 11, 1947

Lewiston Morning Tribune July 13, 1947

45 The Gazette and Daily July 12, 1947

46 The Miami News, Honolulu Star Bulletin, East Oregonian, Salt Lake Telegram, Twin Falls Times News July 11, 1947

47 Another source reported the whole contraption was approximately 12 inches thick from dome peak to dome peak.

48 Twin Falls Times News July 13, 1947

The day after four boys confessed the hoax According to an Associated Press dispatch the boys created and planted in a yard "an object that looked to them, as well as to the army and civilian officers, just like a flying disc should look." It seems that the concept of a (doubled) domed disc had been becoming quite dominant in the popular imaginary; other sketches, artworks, and tales published by the papers in those weeks seem to confirm such a trend. The object was completed in two days, using parts of an old phonograph, burned out radio tubes and other discarded electrical parts[49].

The Greely Daily Tribune July 12, 1947

Another prank took place in Greely, Colorado. A boy claimed to have found a smoking disc made from a phonograph record, a couple of pieces of wire, a metal cover, a fusa, and some balsa wood for a propeller. The caption introducing the photo of the disc on the local weekly wisely read: "It probably is a fair replica of what some people expect the so-called flying disks to be." The owner of a store exploited the story and the saucer craze, offering $10 for the best model of a flying disc[50].

The Zanesville Times Recorder July 13, 1947

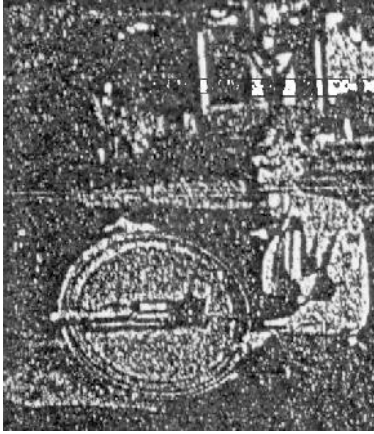
On July 12 one of those baffling discs was seen landing with a crash, near Zanesville, Ohio. A farmer driving his truck after 2:00 pm heard a strange whirring noise in the sky. Poking his head from the truck cab saw something falling from the sky and crashing a short distance in front of him. The farmer walked around the object once or twice before stepping up and throwing it in the back of his truck. When he reached Zanesville he went to a service station for gas: he recounted his story the attendants and left the disc there. The "saucer" was an 18-inch aluminum hubcap from a transport airplane, which had fallen while the plane was in flight over the area[51]. A little boy in Lowell, Massachusetts, found a quarter-inch thick copper plate in a field. It was six three-eights inches in diameter and had some printed letters and numbers. It was quickly revealed as the work of some joker when the reporter of a local newspaper went to the spot[52].

The Lowell Sun July 15, 1947

[49] Asbury Park Press, Buffalo Courier Express, Chicago Tribune, Harrisburg Telegraph, Lewiston Morning Tribune July 12, 1947

[50] The Greely Daily Tribune July 12, 1947

[51] The Zanesville Times Recorder July 13, 1947

[52] The Lowell Sun July 15, 1947

Yankton Press & Dakotan July 15, 1947

At Yankton, South Dakota, somebody left a disc on the lawn of a house on July 13. It was metallic and about 21 inches in diameter, on which some stuff had been mounted: used radio parts, a slender tube resembling a fly-spray container, a drap hanger ring, a network of wires leading nowhere in particular, and an upright metal rod appearing as the "antenna." All this was painted green, and affixed to the assemblage were the figures 257 and a swastika, while on the lid were the figures 57018, all in ordinary decals. The whole thing appeared to be the lid from some large shipping container[53].

In the dead of the night July 15, Mr. C.H. Hancock from Denton, Texas, heard a metallic sound: he thought two cars had clicked fenders. He went outside and found an object left by somebody in his front yard: pranksters had evidently struck it with a hammer. The disc had four spark plugs[54].

Denton record Chronicle July 16, 1947

People kept reporting strange things on the ground that could be one of those mysterious flying contraptions reported by many people. It was also a good way to share a popular attraction and become part of the general excitement. Miss Jo Harris found a 7-inch large flat shiny metal disc stuck edgewise in a vegetable garden at Andalusia, Illinois. Probably it was a circular inspection opening top from a transport airplane which was jarred loose as it was flying in that vicinity[55]. Finding a disc was also a good way to promote an event. On July 17 a flying instructor at Chattanooga, Tennessee, claimed he "discovered and captured" a disc-shaped object at the local airport. Reporters commented that it could have something to do with the air show to be held at the same place just a few days later[56]. A similar gag happened one or two days before

The Daily Times July 17, 1947

The Chattanooga Times July 18, 1947

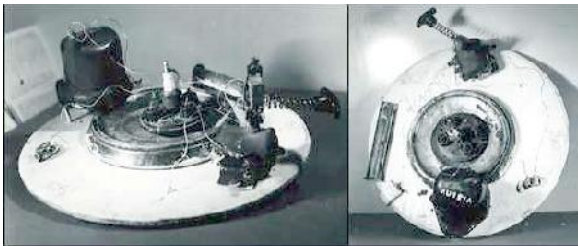
53 Yankton Press & Dakotan July 15, 1947
54 Denton record Chronicle July 16, 1947
55 The Daily Times July 17, 1947
56 The Chattanooga Times July 18, 1947

The Chehalis Advocate July 17, 1947

at Chehalis, Washington. Members of the Chehalis Junior Chamber of Commerce thought to exploit the saucer saga to promote their Lewis County Air Festival set for the next days. They created a large aluminum disc bearing appropriate advertising and placed it on a hillside to be "found" by two festival queen candidates[57].

Hawk Eye Gazette July 23, 1947

A lady named Harriett Dunham found a silver-colored contraption lying upside down in her front yard at Burlington, Iowa. At first, she thought it could be a bomb. It was rigged up with a radio tube, could and condenser wired and soldered together in what looked like a 10-inch cake tin[58].

An unidentified lady from Saybrook, Illinois, reported to the Springfield FBI office the finding of a disc in her front yard in the early morning on July 26. An FBI agent went to the spot and wrote that the stability of the lady was questionable. He got the disc, and it was evident it was the work of some of the juveniles in the area. The object was an old wooden platter, which had assembled on it a silver plate, a spark plug, a timer, and some old brass tubing. The disc was on hold at the Springfield FBI office, to be retained pending receipt of Bureau advice relative to its destruction[59].

FBI pictures of the disc found at Saybrook

57 The Chehalis Advocate, The Centralia Daily Chronicle July 17, 1947
58 Hawk Eye Gazette July 23, 1947
59 FBI Office Memorandum from SAC Springfield, dated August 20, 1947.

PUBLICITY STUNTS

'Disk' Found in Green Lake District Just Kirkland Stunt

MRS. FRANK OSTRANDER and "FLYING DISK"
This disk didn't fly; it was just for publicity

Seattle Daily Times July 8, 1947

Flying saucers were quickly leveraged by the American advertising industry to promote, mostly locally, any products or services [60]. Saucer-shaped paper plates dropped by airplanes were a favorite stunt to advertise events or to offer discounts. One of the first ones to be found was a bit different though: it was a piece of sheet aluminum on which a small paper poster was pasted[61]. The poster advertised a local Summer Festival, and the promoting committee claimed it was attempting to capitalize on the curiosity aroused by the flying disk mystery to obtain cheap publicity. More than 100 of these 14-inch long ovals were left in strategic places all over Seattle. Likely on July 8, a man found a paper plate advertising Army recruiting, without seeing it fluttering to the ground. The officers at the Minnesota-Dakota recruiting district said they knew nothing about that thing[62]. On July 10 a Minnesota newspaper reported ironically[63] a similar event involving the fall of several tens of paper plates where it appeared to read: "Join the Civil Air Patrol. Army recruiting station, post office, Winona, Minn."

Star Tribune July9, 1947

Just Like a Pie Plate

Flying Saucers Bombard City; Alert Air Raid Warden Recovers One

The Winona Republican Herald July 11, 1947

Later in August, a few newspapers announced local drops from civilian aircrafts of paper plates promoting Army recruiting or similar information[64].

The city of Waterloo, Iowa, was bombarded[65] by about 5,000 9-inch paper "flying saucers" on the afternoon of July 9. They were dropped by two airplanes to remind people a local sports event.

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[60] Verga, M. (2016) – "Come ti vendo il disco. 1947: i dischi volanti nella pubblicità". Cielo Insolito #2, 10-27

[61] Seattle Daily Times July 8, 1947

[62] Star Tribune July 9, 1947

[63] The Winona Republican Herald July 11, 1947

[64] The Ligonier Echo August 29, 1947

[65] Waterloo Daily Courier July 10, 1947

The Tampa tribune July 10, 1947

Waterloo's "Flying Saucer"

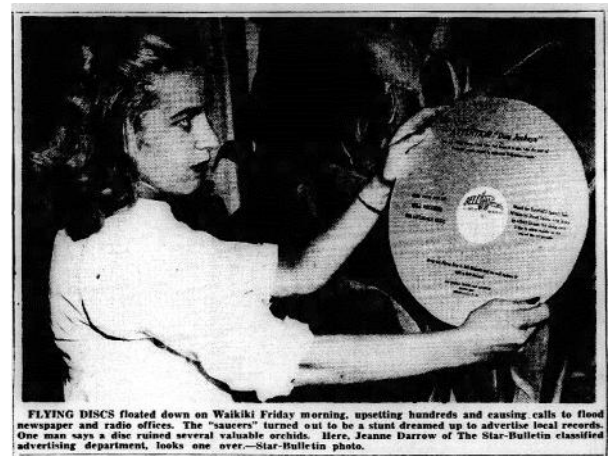
Carl Boughton, Wagner hotel, Waterloo, shows one of the 5,000 "flying saucers" with which Waterloo was bombarded Wednesday afternoon. The "saucer" actually is a nine inch paper plate reminding that the Waterloo White Hawks return home Friday night to open a six day stand. The plates were dropped from two airplanes.

Waterloo Daily Courier July 10, 1947

A Florida newspaper published the photo of a group of ladies throwing paper plates next to a parked plane. On July 9 five planes dropped hundreds of those white and silver plates bearing inscriptions urging local voters to "Register and Vote Yes" in a referendum to be held on August 5 on annexation of Tampa suburbs. Some residents called the newspaper to report sighting the famed flying discs.

FLYING DISCS floated down on Waikiki Friday morning, upsetting hundreds and causing calls to flood newspaper and radio offices. The "saucers" turned out to be a stunt dreamed up to advertise local records. One man says a disc ruined several valuable orchids. Here, Jeanne Darrow of The Star-Bulletin classified advertising department, looks one over.—Star-Bulletin photo.

Honolulu Star Bulletin July 12, 1947

Even at Honolulu, Hawai, large paper plates fell from the sky, this time to advertise local records. One man said a disc ruined several valuable orchids, while hundreds of others were upset and called newspaper and radio offices[66].

Washington Post July 17, 1947

On July 16, 200 paper plates were scattered from a low flying airplane over Falls Church, Virginia. They bored announcements of the town's September fiesta to raise funds for a public park. The caption of the photograph introducing the news read "No cause for alarm."[67]

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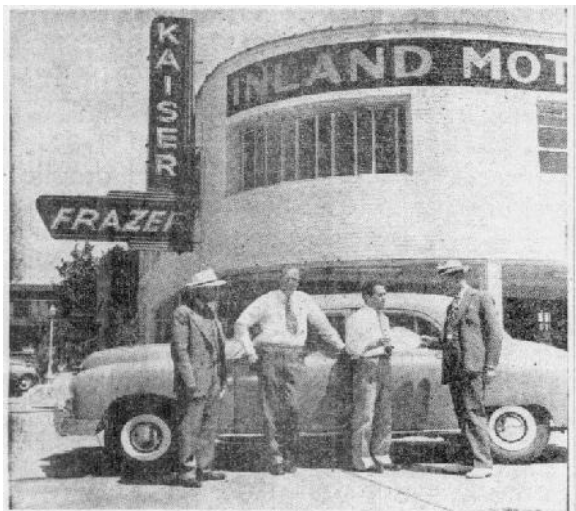
66 Honolulu Star Bulletin July 12, 1947

67 Washington Post July 17, 1947

Casper Star Tribune july 20, 1947

Around noon on July 19, about 3,000 12-inch cardboard disks were released over Casper, Wyoming. It was a massive advertising stunt promoted by a local car dealer: those who retrieved the saucers read an invitation to take a ride in one of the new Frazier Manhattans car [68] . Such stunts were used throughout October, although less frequently. Some local newspapers offered some funny photographs of what happened in those episodes. In early August a caption titled "Typical scene on flying saucer day" introduced a photo with many adults and youngsters trying to snare one of the 300 disks released over Estherville, Iowa, from airplanes: the Junior Chamber of Commerce sponsored the event[69]. A local festival was promoted in Marshfield, Wisconsin, by the launch of hundreds of paper "flying saucers" each noon during three days. The discs allowed the lucky people finding them to redeem from 50 cents to $5 in merchandise. A newspaper photo[70] depicted two employees showing some of those saucers to be scattered over the city. A few days later several citizens of Allentown, Pennsylvania, found on the streets the paper plated dropped by a couple of planes. The plates had a text printed on it reading "This is not a flying saucer. But it is a reminder that this is Red Feather week. Have you made your pledge?"[71] Scores of other paper plates were not launched from an airplane but set off from the Sear Roebuck tower in Minneapolis,

Estherville Daily News August 8, 1947

The Marshfield News Herald October 15, 1947

68 Casper Star Tribune July 20, 1947
69 Estherville Daily News August 8, 1947
70 The Marshfield News Herald October 15, 1947
71 The Allentown Morning Call October 19, 1947

Minnesota. According to the caption of a newspaper picture [72], "hundreds" of pedestrians were scrambling for them, but a close examination of the photo doesn't show such a frenzy.

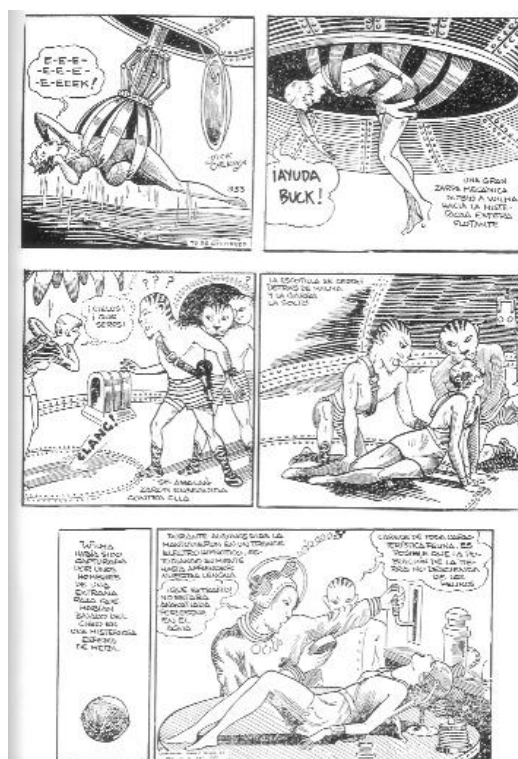
The Minneapolis Star October 23, 1947

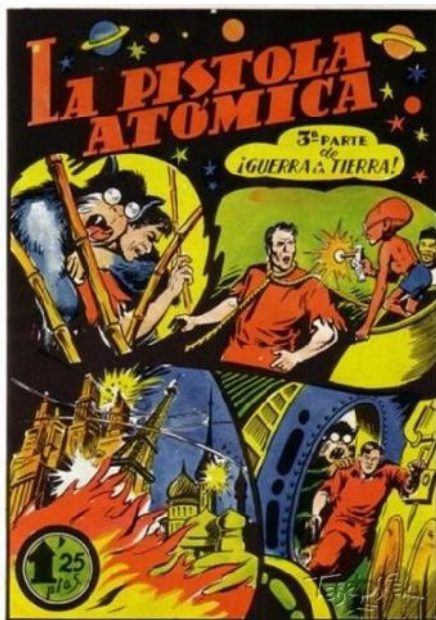
The Allentown Morning Call October 19, 1947

M.Verga

72 The Minneapolis Star October 23, 1947

Fictional and “real” aliens in Spain up to 1951

The first alien depicted in a Spanish paper seems to have appeared in the story “Un viaje al planeta Júpiter / A voyage to Jupiter” in the weekly “Gente Menuda” (Madrid) from August 17th, 1907 onwards. Created and illustrated by Joaquín Xauradó (1872-1933), it precedes by several months the arrival at the United States of Mr. Skygack from Mars, usually considered the first extraterrestrial character in the comics.

From then onwards, the Spanish people would become quite familiar with foreign SF comics depicting aliens. Several of them were soon translated into Spanish, such as the famous Buck Rogers’ story “Tiger Men from Mars” (1930) or the space adventures of Connie Kurridge (named here as María Cortés y la Doctora Arden) in 1942. These stories contain many UFO elements, as described by later UFO witnesses and abductees.

The foreign material came not only from the United States but also from France and Great Britain. So in 1946, Editorial Marco published in seven B/W comics with colored covers "¡GUERRA A LA TIERRA!", the invasion story just created in France by Jacques Marijac and drawn by Auguste Liquois and Pierre Duteurte. Francisco Darnis (1910-1966) drew the Spanish covers.

The same happened with US super-heroes. They were usually frown upon by the Catholic authorities, but the very first Spanish issue of CAPITÁN MARVEL in 1947,

included an alien invasion (even if it was really hoaxed by Profesor Sivana) (Original: CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES 065 – September 1946).

SE ACERCAN LOS «PLATILLOS VOLANTES»

UN AVIADOR ACUSA SU PASO POR EL GOLFO DE GASCUÑA

Irún 14. (De nuestro corresponsal.) El capitán Norman Waugh, de la Aviación inglesa, al aterrizar en el aeródromo de Burdeos, ha declarado ante las autoridades que cuando volaba sobre el golfo de Gascuña vió perfectamente cómo atravesaba el espacio un "platillo volante" a velocidad extraordinaria y dejando una estela muy visible y luminosa. La noticia ha sido transmitida al ministerio del Aire con las observaciones hechas por el aviador inglés.

AB July 15, 1947

EL SUPUESTO "PLATILLO VOLADOR", OBSERVADO EN CARTAGENA

A primera hora de la noche se recibió en Redacción un telegrama de Cartagena dando cuenta de que a las cinco de la madrugada el párroco del barrio de la Concepción observó desde su alcoba un intenso resplandor. En el cielo brillaba una luz roja que emanaba de lo que se le imaginó ser un disco de fuego que lanzaba chispas y que, finalmente, desapareció. Seis o siete minutos después advirtió que el redondel luminoso reventó, formándose una gran columna de humo.

ABC (Madrid) August 3, 1947

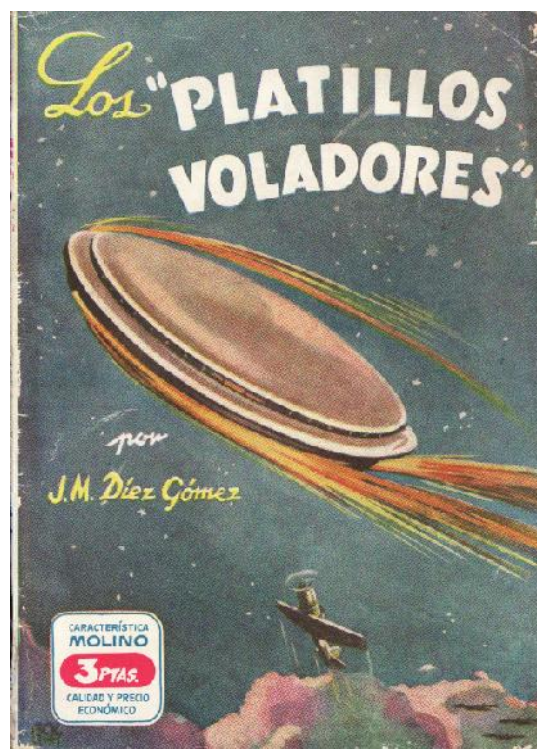
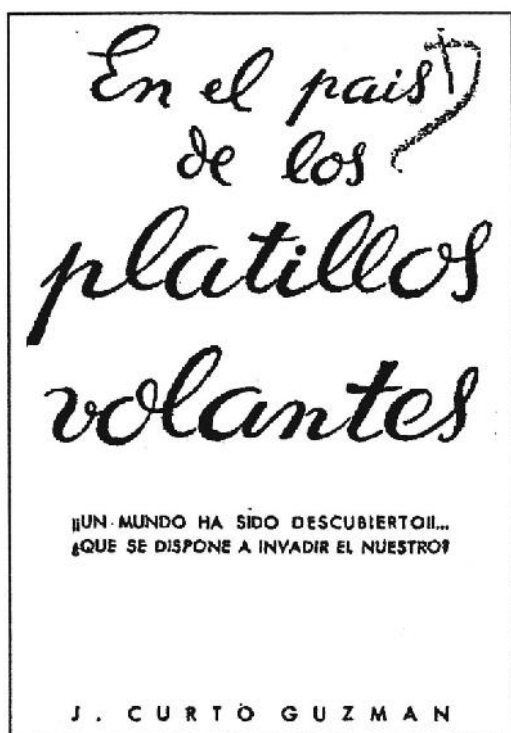
These are the first two newsclippings about saucers over Spain published in 1947. RAF Captain Waugh probably saw just a bolide over the sea, and the sighting made by a priest at Cartagena is explained at the end of the clipping itself: the "fiery disk" was caused by a grounded high voltage cable and the subsequent bursting and explosion. The very first article in the Spanish press about the novel flying saucers appeared in July 8th, 1947 and cited an American source (the director of a San Diego magazine) saying they could be spaceships from Mars (1).

A usual trick to allow an interplanetary adventure for a terrestrial without access to a rocket was to find an alien vessel landed. One early example appeared on December 1947 in the weekly comic "El Coyote" (#12 to #37). The protagonist, who will become "El jinete del espacio / Space rider", was a famous Spanish actor filming in the Sahara desert. During a sand storm, he and

a friend got into a spaceship (not a saucer) thinking it was some kind of prop. But it is a real alien machine and they got abducted into outer space. Created by José Mallorquí (1913-1972) and illustrated by Darnis (1910-1966).

In the early years, not all flying saucers had an alien origin. The "Yellow Peril" was very much in the plots at the time, so it was inevitable that Grafidea would use those new and advanced weapons (including paralyzing rays) for a new collection about a Chinese "mad doctor". Writer Federico Amorós (1914-1991) and artist Juan Martínez Osete (1914-1991) authored LA MANO QUE APRIETA GRAFIDEA, in 12 installments.

The first flying saucer books published in Spain were both fictional. A totally unkown writer (J. Curto Guzmán) published in 1950, *En el país de los platillos volantes* / *In the country of the flying saucers*. A 100-pages novel, its plot centers around a Spanish inventor and his "Rayo Interplanetario", an elipsoid spaceship. Reaching the astounding speed of 300 Km/s, the inventor and his assistant took off 26 years ago into outer space. They found an inhabited planet and landed on it. As planned, the spaceship self-destroyed but the inventor

unexpectedly died from emotion. Alone, the assistant explored the planet, found a civilization (the *Vsthikuantzi)* and befriended an alien named Chipi. After several years (he even married a local woman called Azulinda), homesickness overcomes him and he rebuilds the spaceship and returns to Earth. The author explains that the flying saucers seen in the skies at the time are the aliens who came in pursuit, adding a final alarming detail: the aliens are werewolfs. A very modest edition by Gráficas Nebrija and no literary value mean that only two copies are known, both at the National Library (2).

One of the writers working for the publishing house Editorial Molino was tasked with a short volume of 63 pages. Titled *Los "platillos voladores" / The "flying saucers",* it was probably published to take advantage of the first known ufo wave over Spain. With a strong religious and poetic content, J.M. Díez Gómez describes the life of the selenites and other aliens (3). On Monday, March 20th, 1950 the first flying saucer was seen in Spain by several men at Guijuelo (Salamanca). To our modern eyes the description given seems very similar to a jet (a bright metallic object crossing the cloudy sky at high speed and altitude), unknown at the time in our country. This was the starting point of a national "ufo wave", very much publicized by the press. Cabria points out to the following phases in the media treatment:

- January 1950: First speculations about Martians (reporting the ideas of Donald H. Keyhoe).

- January 1950: Reports about strange phenomena in the skies.
- February 1950: Articles about flying saucers from Mars.
- Early March 1950: Flying saucer sightings around the world.
- 21 March onwards: Flying saucers seen in every corner of Spain, first by normal people and soon also by "first-rate observers" (pilots, soldiers…). The first photo of a ufo taken in Spain appeared on April 3 (Majorca). It looks like a "fiery wheel" and it was probably a publicity stunt. The wave ended around April 25th (4).

MADRID

DIARIO DE LA NOCHE

Abril 3

Hemos visto un "platillo volante"

Cuatro mallorquines relatan cómo se produjo el maravilloso suceso

Apareció entre Montuiri y Villafranca

Una fotografía sensacional de Hausmann

LA TARDE

La cuestión es pasar el rato

Los "platillos volantes" son la "moda" que ha sustituido a la de los Stradivarius

Nosotros también hemos visto un platillo volando

Málaga, Sábado 25 de Marzo de 1950 — 50 céntimos

Jefe del Estado clausura el I Congreso ...al de Ingeniería Agronómica

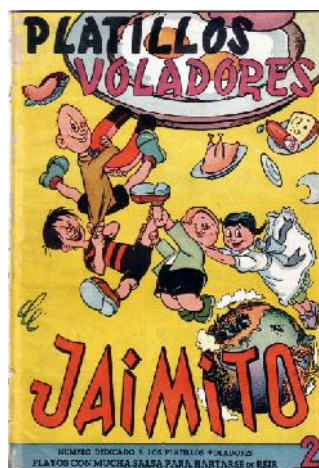
Fueron entregadas al CAUDILLO las conclusiones adoptadas

Asistieron al acto los ministros de Agricultura, Educación Nacional, Industria y Comercio y Obras Públicas

Only three humanoid cases are known from contemporary sources during the 1950 wave in Spain. The first one was reported at my home town, Malaga, on Saturday, March 25th. "After all those news about flying saucers everywhere, I wondered why they had not visited our hospitable town so I began to watch the skies. My efforts got rewarded. Yesterday I saw a flying saucer! Even more: I had an interview with one of its occupants!" This is the beginning of a letter to the editor appeared in the local newspaper "La Tarde". The witness does not bother to describe neither the ufo nor its occupants (but the letter was printed alongside an allegorical drawing). He does explain how he talked with the aliens about many subjects, including bullfighting! Clearly, a joke (5).

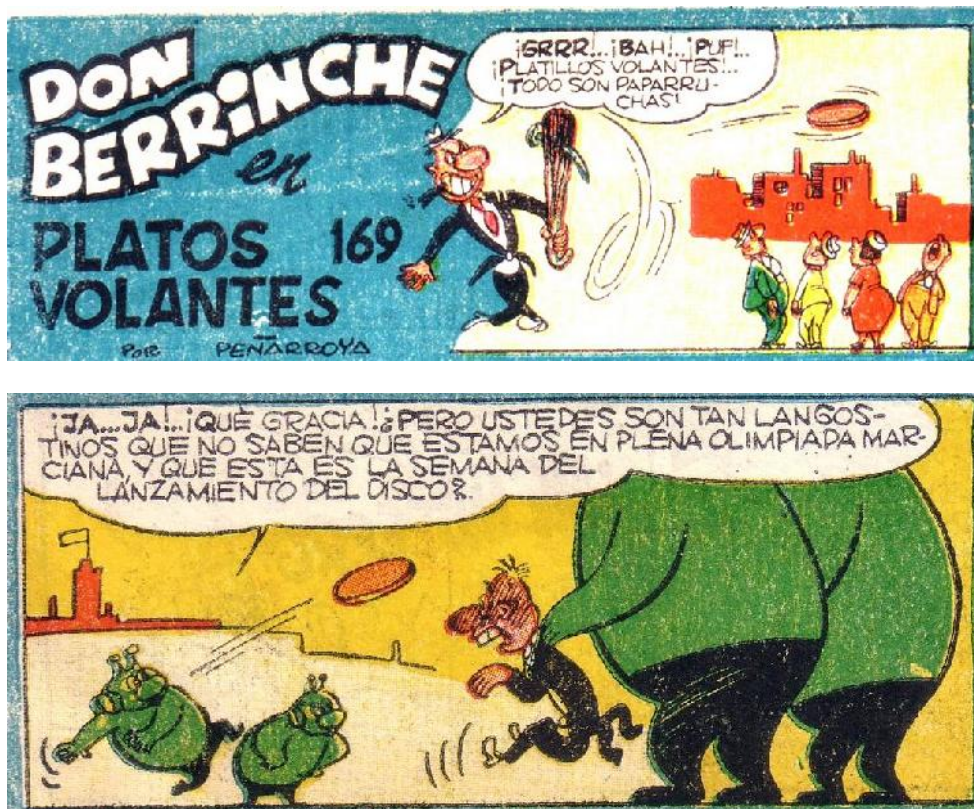
On April 17th, at dawn, an elliptic flying saucer was seen over Salamanca. As a curious detail, the witness added that he "observed some silhouettes like people around the flying saucer" (6). In Spain, the equivalent of April's Fools Day is December 28th. In that day of 1950, the readers of the local newspaper at Córdoba were amused to learn how very early in the morning (03:45 am) a person allegedly called the newspaper informing that an object was observed crashing into the ground at Las Ermitas, a small village in the valley. Its

occupants were several small beings dressed in blue, with flames coming out their heads, who run away. Allegedly, when the journalist arrived at the site, he only found a bubbling lake but noticed plenty of lights in the surrounding woods. Curiously, the same journalist repeated the tall story in the same newspaper 18 years later (7).

At the end of the wave or soon after (no more precise date available) there appeared a wonderful Extra issue of the comicbook "Pulgarcito", devoted exclusively to flying saucers.

It was a mixture of jokes about thrown crockery or the high prices of food, short stories where the main characters of the comic met aliens, and also a couple of "serious" notes reporting several saucer cases (Mantell, Chiles-Whitted) plus three quite peculiar national cases.

¿PLATILLOS VOLANTES O FANTASIAS?

Even the artists of the publication contributed with their own ideas about the new phenomenon.

The first comic character to encounter flying saucers would be DON BERRINCHE, created and drawn by José Peñarroya (1910-1975), in “Pulgarcito” (Bruguera) #169 (September 1950). Despite his initial skepticism, he will finally discover the saucers came from Mars because they are competing in their Olympics and one of the events was discus throw.

Luis R. González

NOTES

(1) Ignacio Cabria García, Así nos invadieron los ‘platillos volantes’, in “Anuario de Cuadernos de Ufologia”, no. 30, 2004, p. 4.

(2) Martí Fló, El primer libro español sobre OVNIs,in “Papers d’Ovnis”, May-December 1999, no. 15-18, pp. 14-16.

(3) Ignacio Cabria García, *Entre ufólogos, creyentes y contactados – Una historia social de los OVNIS en España,* 1993, p.16.

(4) Ignacio Cabria García, Así nos invadieron los ‘platillos volantes’, in “Anuario de Cuadernos de Ufologia”, no. 30, 2004, pp. 2-61.

(5) “La Tarde”, Málaga, 25 March 1950.

(6) “El Adelanto”, Salamanca, 23 April 1950. [Credit: Juan C. Victorio Uranga].

(7) “Diario de Córdoba”, Córdoba, 28 December 1950.

Trieste, 1953: una contattista di area teosofica?

Nel 1955, a Zurigo, città della finanza internazionale, un impiegato di banca di mezza età, J. Heinrich Ragaz, appassionatosi ai dischi volanti, prese a pubblicare un bollettino dedicato all'argomento, *Weltraum und Wir* ("Noi e lo spazio"). Ebbe subito riscontro nell'area germanofona, l'anno dopo gli cambiò nome in *Weltraumbote* ("Il messaggero dello spazio") e fino al 1961 si fece eco di una gran quantità di notizie e di storie bizzarre sul fenomeno.
La sua importanza da noi fu minima, sia per la precocità dell'uscita rispetto alla nascita di un vero ambiente ufologico italiano, che io colloco nel 1957, sia per la generale incapacità degli appassionati nostrani a leggere il tedesco.
Eppure, esso contiene notizie interessanti anche per il nostro Paese. Qualcuno da noi lo leggeva, fra quelli attenti al fenomeno. Non dovrebbe sorprendere il fatto che, piuttosto presto, su "Weltraumbote" sia comparsa la lettera di una donna che, molto probabilmente, conosceva il tedesco per le sue origini, visto che pur avendo un cognome italianissimo era di Trieste, una città a quel tempo ancora colma dell'influenza culturale dell'ex-Impero asburgico.
Questa lettera rappresenta una delle prime fonti su un'esperienza contattistica vissuta da un'italiana e, al contempo, un esempio succinto ma interessante della probabile mescolanza fra questione ufologica e ambienti occultistici che si era già da anni manifestata anche da noi.
Uscì sul numero 8-9 di luglio-agosto 1956, alle pagine 19-20. Lo ha gentilmente segnalato lo studioso svizzero Bruno Mancusi.
Ve ne presento una traduzione integrale e, di seguito, qualche spunto per indagini ben più ampie.

Che cosa posso riferire intorno agli Ufo

Suppongo verso il febbraio del 1953, un'alba mi svegliai e ricevetti il seguente messaggio telepatico:

"A voi, cari fratelli e sorelle nello spirito che siete qui riuniti: a tutti gli esseri umani è consentito, attraverso il comune lavoro, giungere alla pace e al progresso e pervenire ad uno sviluppo creativo dell'intera umanità al momento impedito da forze distruttive e negative.
Noi siamo esseri di comunità planetarie giunti qui per aiutarvi perché la catastrofe che si sta preparando non abbia luogo.

Sin dall'antichità sono comparsi certi elementi che hanno assunto il potere. Reazioni a catena di tipo negativo operano in modo sinergico sull'intero pianeta.
Noi, esseri avanzati, ci siamo posti nei pressi della Terra e abbiamo collocato una base sul vostro satellite, ma dato che il vostro pianeta si trova in così grave agitazione ci manteniamo invisibili. Esistono nostre basi spaziali dalle quali operiamo sbarchi a scopo esplorativo e comunichiamo telepaticamente con i gran Lama che si trovano nella regione del deserto di Gobi o del Tibet himalaiano".

Interferire come mediatori

"Siamo venuti in vostro aiuto anche con un'astronave interstellare che si trova nello spazio prossimo alla Terra, pianeta che rischia gli effetti di una devastante reazione a catena finché proseguiranno i pericolosi e potenti esperimenti con bombe all'idrogeno.
Al momento dell'atterraggio, che avverrà in alcuni continenti e località durante periodi di grandi tumulti e in condizioni appropriate dal punto di vista meteorologico e della radioattività del suolo, noi agiremo con determinazione. Ci lasceremo avvicinare senza timori, senza che contro di noi valgano difese o armi. Potremmo spazzarvi via tutti, ma noi siamo venuti per aiutarvi. Questo è lo scopo principale del nostro atterraggio.
Sono stato incaricato di lasciare questo messaggio a tutti coloro che sono in grado di riceverlo, di accettarlo e che hanno la forza per stabilire un contatto.
Alcuni esseri si sono materializzati e le hanno trasmesso il messaggio.
Lei possiede un senso - o un "aspetto" - particolarmente sveglio, e la sua aura segnala chiaramente quello che prova (angoscia, simpatia, ecc.) e un distacco emotivo che le consente di agire senza paura o terrore e di accostarsi a quegli esseri, in modo che possano convincerla delle sue capacità. Senza queste caratteristiche la sua stessa forza ridurrà il mondo in fiamme.
Per questo, fra breve vedrete dei segni per quali non si troverà spiegazione. Questo è quanto volevo che sapesse. Il mio Regno è al di là del bene e del male".

Signora Lou Rossini, Trieste, via Aleardi, 4

Che lo sviluppo dell'ufologia debba molto alla Teosofia (intesa nel senso generale del termine) è cosa oggi abbastanza ben documentata - almeno per alcune parti del mondo. Molto meno lo è per paesi come l'Italia, in cui pure la Società Teosofica presenta vicende lunghe, illustri e articolate.
La mia ipotesi è che la fonte che vi ho presentato possa essere letta in quel contesto.
Comincio col dire che io non so chi fosse l'autrice della lettera. Lou è diminutivo della forma tedesca del nome Luisa (Louise), e a me pare indicare la frequentazione germanofona della Rossini. L'indirizzo da cui scrive, via Aleardo Aleardi 4, a Trieste

corrisponde ad un condominio alto-borghese di fine Ottocento. Se vi abitava, doveva trattarsi di persona di elevata estrazione sociale.
Suppongo che costei potesse avere rapporti con il ben radicato ambiente teosofico triestino: in quegli anni vi era attivissimo, a capo della sezione locale, Edoardo Bratina (1913-1999), che nel 1954 a Trieste aveva dato vita alla casa editrice Sirio e che più tardi diverrà segretario generale della Società Teosofica Italiana, ben presente in città dalla fine del XIX secolo.
Quello che mi convince di più è il linguaggio utilizzato. Gli "esseri di comunità planetarie" che operano nei pressi della Terra e dalla Luna sono in contatto telepatico con i Lama tibetani e himalayani - in perfetta analogia con la tradizione teosofica classica.
Sono qui per ammonirci contro i pericoli delle armi nucleari: la catastrofe è imminente. Per questo si direbbe nei tempi attuali stiano ampliando la cerchia degli iniziati, stabilendo rapporti con persone come la Rossini, che hanno qualità superiori e, soprattutto, un'aura che ne segnala il distacco emotivo necessario per contatti proficui.
Anche stavolta la menzione dell'aura, uno dei capisaldi della dottrina teosofica a partire dalla popolarizzazione fattane da Charles Leadbeater ai primi del XX secolo con il volume "Man, Visible and Invisible", punta nella direzione che ho suggerito.
La conclusione della missiva della Rossini è, se possibile, ancora più interessante. L'entità che le parla per telepatia mescola parole tipiche del Gesù del vangelo di Giovanni - quello da sempre preferito dal pensiero esoterico – cioè "il mio Regno" con una curiosa e sofisticata menzione nietzschiana: *il mio Regno è al di là del bene e del male*. Una frasetta, certo, ma che a mio avviso indica con chiarezza le velleità culturali che muovevano questa donna che, con ogni evidenza, nel 1956 era interessatissima al fenomeno UFO, al punto da dichiararsi in contatto con questi superterrestri e da scrivere a una rivista specializzata.
Tre anni dopo la comparsa di questa lettera, nel 1959, a Venezia, la associazione "Alaya", diretta dai teosofi veneziani Fulvio Rossetti e Giuseppina Vivian[73], introdurrà in Italia traducendoli tutti e con tempestività dal tedesco i libri del gruppo di contattisti medianici berlinesi guidati da Herbert Victor Speer. Gli scritti vedevano al centro i messaggi dell'entità Ashtar Sheran - croce e delizia di tutti gli storici dell'ufologia. Dal '58 il gruppo pubblicava il bollettino "Notiziario dell'Alaya" e aveva una sede immersa nella natura nei pressi di Conegliano Veneto (Treviso).
Mi pare curioso che tutto ciò sia avvenuto nella stessa area geografica, in anni vicini fra loro, in ambito teosofico e con un comune riferimento al tedesco come veicolo linguistico.

[73] A sua volta la Vivian diresse il gruppo teosofico veneziano "Fior di Loto".

Di là da queste modeste speculazioni, certo è che il rapporto fra Teosofia italiana e storia dell'ufologia resta tutto da indagare.

(*g. s.*)

Francia, 1928: Marte attacca?

La storia delle "segnalazioni" indirizzate *in modo volontario* da altri pianeti alla Terra è lunga, ma ebbe il suo periodo di gloria a cavallo fra il XIX e il XX secolo, quando l'opinione pubblica occidentale era ossessionata dal pensiero che Marte fosse abitato da esseri paragonabili a noi.
In tal senso, una vicenda di questo tipo emersa nel 1928 è interessante sotto vari profili. Lo è, perché è tarda rispetto al picco di diffusione di resoconti di questo genere, e lo è perché al contempo sembra annunciare l'avvicinarsi dell'era ufologica.
Proverò adesso ad argomentare quanto sopra usando le poche, insoddisfacenti fonti di cui disponiamo.

Il 24 dicembre 1928, alla pagina 7 del quotidiano londinese "Daily Express", allora popolarissimo, comparve un breve servizio del corrispondente da Parigi. Un "noto studioso francese", Henri Pensa, aveva dichiarato che a suo avviso un certo numero di fenomeni celesti osservati in tempi recenti nel suo Paese potevano essere "tentativi fatti dai marziani di comunicare con la Terra".

Fra gli strani fenomeni Pensa menziona stelle cadenti e grandi razzi ("great rockets", N. d. R.) *visti per tre notti di seguito dagli abitanti di Rodez, nel sud della Francia, il mese scorso. Gli osservatori del posto sostengono che questi fenomeni provenivano dalla direzione di Marte. Sembravano dei grandi razzi.*

Dunque, nel novembre del '28 a Rodez, città capoluogo del dipartimento dell'Aveyron, sarebbero stati osservati strani fenomeni aerei che "provenivano dalla direzione di Marte" (assumo che il riferimento fosse al percorso apparente compiuto da questi fenomeni nella volta celeste).

Ma Pensa collegava queste osservazioni ad altre precedenti di cui lui era stato protagonista.

"In più, sono assai perplesso da una curiosa condizione da me osservata l'inverno scorso", dice il sig. Pensa. "Per un certo numero di notti buie, fra le otto e le undici, quando non erano visibili né le stelle né la Luna, ho visto una luce brillante – tanto da poter vedere una persona a cento metri. E' stata una cosa stranissima, e in relazione ai recenti tentativi fatti dalla Terra per comunicare con Marte, si potrebbe persino credere che i marziani provino a mandarci segnali dall'altra parte. Forse stanno cercando di bombardare ad ore fisse la Terra con dei sistemi scientifici d'illuminazione per attirare la nostra attenzione, ma siccome a così grandi distanze è difficile regolare l'arrivo dei loro fasci, questi segnali arrivano in modo irregolare[i].

Questa storia ebbe una vita strana. Dopo questa prima versione, l'11 gennaio 1929, George Axelsson (1899-1966), corrispondente da Parigi della International News Service, agenzia di stampa di primo piano e del "Chicago Tribune" trasmise un lungo servizio che fu ripreso dai quotidiani anglosassoni e che pare indicare che dopo il primo lancio la storia ebbe una certa risonanza.

In questa versione Pensa diventa un astronomo - e questo pare essere un errore: circa l'identità di Pensa dirò fra poco - e compaiono alcuni dettagli sui fatti di Rodez. Si trattava di "scie simili a quelle di meteore", viste per tre notti di seguito, sempre alla stessa ora e sempre mentre procedevano nella stessa direzione.

I fenomeni da lui visti l'inverno precedente e a novembre avevano avuto per testimoni altri suoi "colleghi scienziati" ed erano rappresentati da "un bagliore argenteo".

Avendo avuto poco successo nel comunicare in quel modo (con l'uso di "onde luminose"), secondo Pensa era possibile che a Rodez i marziani si fossero manifestati "in modo più violento", cioè con un "bombardamento interplanetario" rappresentato dalle meteore.

Questo servizio era accompagnato dal parere di un astronomo francese importante e venerato, Michel Giacobini (1873-1938), scopritore di comete e soprattutto della Giacobini-Zinner, connessa allo sciame meteorico che da lì a pochi anni, il 9 ottobre 1933, si manifesterà con un incredibile bombardamento dell'atmosfera che secondo alcune stime raggiungerà un massimo di seimila meteore per ora, in molti posti accompagnate da bolidi di grande intensità.

Giacobini era dunque titolatissimo a discettare sul "bombardamento marziano" di Pensa.

"Se si trattava davvero di segnali" - parrebbe che Giacobini, almeno su un piano del mero ragionamento non irridesse all'idea - si sarebbe dovuto rispondere imitando il sistema marziano di segnalazione luminosa, ma il problema era che per esser visti da quel pianeta si doveva disporre di una fonte di luce grande quanto Parigi…

Nel suo numero di marzo 1929, a p. 65, la rivista americana "Popular Science" riprendeva la storia più o meno negli stessi termini giù visti, precisando che Pensa era uno scrittore secondo il quale i fenomeni dell'anno precedente e quelli più recenti ("stelle luminose che scoppiavano in una miriade di scintille") erano "bombe luminose" lanciate per comunicare con noi terrestri.

* * *

Io credo che i contorni generali della vicenda siano questi. Nell'ottobre-novembre 1928, come Maurizio Verga ha documentato ampiamente con il suo lavoro[ii], il mondo è ipnotizzato da uno strano personaggio, il londinese Hugh Mansfield Robinson, che con vari sistemi riceve ed invia messaggi ai marziani. Marte in quelle settimane è al perigeo, ma Robinson usa anche sistemi non convenzionali, "psichici", per comunicare. Descrive i marziani con cui è in comunicazione, ne disegna i volti. Induce molti, in diversi Paesi, a cercare di captare segnali inviatici via radio dal pianeta rosso.

E' altamente probabile che quando Pensa, alla fine di dicembre 1928, parlava di "recenti tentativi fatti dalla Terra per comunicare con Marte" intendesse riferirsi a Robinson. E' alla luce di quelle notizie che dovette collegare quelle che a suo avviso erano due anomalie: le osservazioni fatte l'inverno precedente da lui e da suoi indefinibili "colleghi scienziati" e le notizie di avvistamenti di "grandi razzi" a Rodez, nel sud della Francia, che parevano promanare dal quadrante celeste in cui Marte era visibile.

Nel primo caso non sappiamo, come, dove e con chi si trovasse Pensa - della biografia dell'uomo dirò fra poco - nel secondo non so da dove giunsero a Pensa le informazioni sui fenomeni della cittadina del centro-sud francese.

Quel che è quasi certo è che ora, dopo le storie su Robinson, Pensa sospetta che i segnali fatti da Marte giungano nella nostra atmosfera "più violenti" che in precedenza. Marte si avvicina, Marte è deciso a comunicare, Marte è alle porte. Siamo alle soglie dell'era dei dischi volanti: essa inizierà soltanto diciotto anni e mezzo dopo, ma tutto con Pensa è pronto. Visto che non rispondiamo come si deve via radio, via telegrafo, via segnali luminosi inviati in modo sempre vistoso ma *dalla distanza*, ai marziani non resta che fare il passo decisivo e venire sulla Terra con i loro mezzi.

Fra le tante questioni inevase che queste fonti pongono ne resta forse una più grande di tutte. Perché Henri Pensa era così convinto delle visite marziane? Che cosa c'entrava lui con il mondo dell'astronomia, dei fenomeni celesti insoliti, dei tentativi di comunicazione fra mondi abitati? La sua biografia di uomo illustre non pare contenere nessun chiaro indizio in questo senso.

Pensa era un giurista, uno studioso di questioni diplomatiche. Nato a Nizza nel 1865, accademico di Francia, fu autore di un gran numero di opere di tutt'altro tenore, di solito relative a questioni di politica internazionale di rilievo fra l'ultimo decennio del XIX secolo e gli anni '20 del XX. Al momento dei fatti che ci interessano, dunque, aveva sessantatré anni.

La sola cosa che mi colpisce è il fatto che, in età matura, negli anni '30 (morirà nel 1946 a La Boutière Chenôves, nella stessa parte di Francia dove era nato e non lontano da quella in cui giace Rodez), Pensa pubblicherà due lavori di tono differente dal solito e che sembrano indicare un'attenzione per questioni genericamente "insolite". Si tratta di "Sorcellerie et réligion. Du désordre dans les esprits et dans les moeurs aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles" (uscito nel 1933 per le edizioni Alcan di Parigi) e di "Contes et légendes de Bourgogne" (Editions de la Revue du Centre, Parigi, 1936). Di certo non era un astronomo, come Axelsson lo etichettò nel suo servizio per l'agenzia INS, e occorrerebbe capire *in primis* quale sia stato il contesto delle sue esperienze personali e con chi le ebbe.

(*g. s.*)

[i] Il quotidiano australiano "Western Mail" (Perth) del 23 maggio 1929 riprenderà alla lettera questa prima fonte come se si trattasse di una notizia dell'ultimo momento.

[ii] Verga, Maurizio. Terra chiama Marte. Prima degli UFO c'erano i marziani, UPIAR, Torino, 2013.

Abstracts

La meteora "nebulosa" di Udine (G.Stilo, pp. 2-7). – In 1925 the Italian scientific magazine "Urania" published a detailed report about a bizarre sky phenomenon. It was sighted in Udine (North-East Italy) on May 10, 1923 and described as a "hazy meteor." The witnesses were the manager of the local observatory, Mr. Arturo Malignani, and some other upper-class people. Malignani and the magazine's editors were puzzled by the phenomenon. It was a "beam" made from a large quantity of red-yellow small stars, without any trail, moving from about 15° over the horizon to about 55°. Its angular size grew from 1.5 – 2 degrees to 3 -4 degrees, suggesting a speed of 2.5 degrees/second or so.

Here they are! Early crashes of flying saucers: a short visual history (M.Verga, pp. 8-27). – Durante la gigantesca ondata del 1947, uno dei sentimenti diffusi nella popolazione bombardata da notizie sui dischi volanti era quello di riuscire a vederne uno. L'offerta di importanti premi in denaro per chi fosse riuscito a presentare un "vero" disco e la voglia di fare scherzi che avrebbero sicuramente ricevuto spazio sui giornali locali (e non), vista la mania collettiva del momento, generarono decine di ritrovamenti di "dischi precipitati" in tutti gli Stati Uniti. Si trattava di aggeggi solitamente discoidali, sovente arricchiti da tubi, valvole termoioniche ed altri accessori destinati a fornire una parvenza di tecnologia, fatti trovare nei cortili e nei giardini di persone che li avrebbero poi trovati, comunicando la scoperta al quotidiano locale. Erano modelli quasi sempre primitivi e, spesso, al limite del ridicolo, ma furono comunque oggetto di curiosità ed ironia, ma anche, in alcuni casi, di interesse da parte dell' FBI o dell'esercito, allo scopo di capire di che cosa si trattasse. Numerosi furono i ritrovamenti di palloni meteorologici o loro componenti, come pure di piatti pubblicitari di carta lanciati da aerei per promuovere eventi o vendite sfruttando l'enorme popolarità acquisita dai dischi volanti in pochissimi giorni.

Fictional and "real" aliens in Spain up to 1951 (L.R.Gonzalez, 28-36). – L'Autore presenta documenti che mostrano come il concetto di visite extraterrestri alla Terra sia diffuso nella proto-fumettistica spagnola almeno dal 1907 e come, con il sorgere del fenomeno dei dischi volanti, già dall'autunno 1947 esso fece la sua comparsa nei periodici per bambini e per ragazzi, sia - in prevalenza – come arma segreta o invenzione di scienziati folli, sia come velivolo extraterrestre, così anticipando quanto accadde nella primavera del 1950, quando l'ETH dilagò anche in Spagna e fecero la loro comparsa, dalla fine di marzo in poi, almeno tre racconti di incontri con marziani in Spagna, tutti di chiara impronta scherzosa. Essi, tuttavia, aprivano la strada alla comparsa dei "veri" incontri del terzo tipo anche nella penisola iberica.

Trieste, 1953: una contattista di area teosofica? (G. Stilo, pp. 37-39). – In 1956 the Swiss UFO magazine "Weltraumbote" published a letter from a certain Mrs. Lou Rossini, an Italian lady living in Trieste. She described her psychic contacts (Febraury 1953) with an extraterrestrial warning about the atomic peril. He reported about his talks with the Lama masters in Tibet, a Moon base and a plan related to the future landing of their starship. The extraterrestrials were usually invisible, and they kept in touch with those having a really good aura only, just like Mrs. Rossini. According to Stilo, the analysis of the woman's tale leads to thinking that an Italian theosophical group of the time had to be interested in flying saucers and contactism.

Francia, 1928: Marte attacca? (G. Stilo, pp. 40-43). – Henri Pensa, a quite well-known French student of international affairs, claimed to have seen some unusual sky phenomena. He also claimed they were some sort of signals sent by Mars to contact us. It is likely Pensa had been influenced by the news published by many newspapers about Mansfield Robinson, an Englishman reporting his radio and psychic contacts with Mars and its inhabitants. It seems Pensa had some sightings that year, but details about the phenomena and the other witnesses who were with him are still very poor.